



15TH TRIENNIAL ASSEMBLY UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Standing Committee

29 Recognition of Sovereignty

That the Assembly resolve:

To affirm that the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Islander Peoples, are sovereign peoples in this land.

Proposer: Stuart McMillan

Seconder: Colleen Geyer

Rationale:

We stand with First Peoples of this land by virtue of the Covenant we hold together.

The Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution (paragraph 2) acknowledges that:

“Through this land God has nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves, to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning ‘sovereign’ in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.”

In the Covenant Statement of 1994 the Uniting Church says:

“We lament our people took your land from you as if it were land belonging to nobody.”

The 14th Assembly repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, and its theological foundations as a relic of colonialism, feudalism, and religious, cultural, and racial biases that have no place in the treatment of First Peoples.

At the 14th Assembly we agreed to spend the next triennium in conversation considering what it would mean for the practices of the Church to honour First Peoples as sovereign. First Peoples have never ceded their sovereignty which is of the Creator and springs from the very soil of this land.

The Covenant Statements, the Preamble to the Constitution and various apologies and statements the Uniting Church has made to the First Peoples leave one matter unsaid, the acknowledgment and affirmation that First Peoples are sovereign.

This proposal is important to us because everything that has been done over the past 41 years point to this, even in the preamble UAICC speak of themselves as sovereign. The Uniting Church has never affirmed First Peoples as sovereign. All that we do in our covenant walk together is underpinned by, and flows from, this fundamental truth. In this, in resolving that First Peoples are sovereign, the 15th Assembly gives moral leadership to our nation.